DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 243 521 JC 840 194

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TITLE New Options in Offender Education.
PUB DATE 3 Apr 84
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (64th, Washington, DC, April 1-4, 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Education; *Computer Assisted Instruction; *Correctional Education; Correctional Rehabilitation; *Employment; *Federal Programs; Job Training; Prisoners; Program Descriptions; *Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *UNICOR

ABSTRACT

The mission of UNICOR is both to employ and educate inmates of federal prisons. Currently, UNICOR provides employment to approximately 8,000, or 26% of the total federal prison population, in emerging fields such as electronics, data graphics, wood, and plastics and in traditional fields such as metals, shoe and brush, and textiles. In support of inmate education and training, UNICOR allocates over $3 million to ongoing vocational education programs, as well as $400,000, annually, to upgrade vocational machinery and equipment. In 1983 and 1984, an additional $3 million was allocated, annually, to support innovative vocational programs, e.g., in petroleum technology, computerized drafting, numerically controlled machine operations, computer programming and maintenance, and water treatment. Concurrent with the new vocational training initiative, the Bureau of Prisons established a mandatory literacy policy, requiring all inmates with less than 6th grade educational skills to enroll in a literacy program. Another new development in offender education involves the use of computers to assist in all phases of education. Early efforts to introduce computer-assisted instruction were largely abandoned due to high costs, lack of courseware, and hardware problems; however, recent efforts have been more successful with computer-assisted instruction now available in all but eight federal prisons. These new developments in correctional education are able to assist released offenders in finding and retaining jobs. (LAL)

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NEW OPTIONS IN OFFENDER EDUCATION

Annual Conference of the
American Association of Community
and Junior Colleges
April 3, 1984
Washington, D.C.

JC 840 194

Presented by:

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NEW OPTIONS IN OFFENDER EDUCATION *

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INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Prisons is comprised of 43 correctional facilities ranging in size from a few hundred inmates up to over a thousand. Some, such as penitentiaries, provide maximum confinement, and others, such as correctional institutions and prison camps, provide medium or minimum security. The population of federal prisons has been rising steadily in recent years and is now in excess of 31,000. Compared to the total prison population in the United States, approximately 400,000, the Federal Prison System is a relatively small one, but one which, traditionally, has pioneered new programs and new directions.

Some recent innovations have taken place in offender education programs. They were stimulated, in part, by the comments of Chief Justice Warren E. Burger to the graduating class of George Washington University Law School in May, 1981. He urged education for all inmates so that, at a minumum, all would be literate and all would have a saleable skill. This coupling, by the Chief Justice, parallels the manner in which work and education are viewed by federal correctional administrators. Education is under the same organizational umbrella as Prison Industries, which operates under the corporate name "UNICOR." This structure places equal organizational emphasis on both work and education. Both play a role in providing inmates with the best possible post release survival skills.

* Presented to annual conference of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, April 3, 1984. Washington, D.C.

UNICOR's mission is both to employ and to educate inmates, and it is this dual responsibility that is particularly noteworthy. Currently, UNICOR provides employment to approximately 8,000, or some 26% of the total federal prison population. Employment is provided in such emerging fields as electronics, data graphics, and wood and plastics, and in such traditional fields as metals, shoe and brush, and textiles. The Corporation is comprised of seventy five industrial operations whose sales to government agencies totaled approximately $161 million in FY'83 and provided a net income in excess of $7.5 million. Inmates are paid wages ranging from $.42 an hour at the entry level, to $1.05 an hour in the highest labor grade.

To support the second part of its mission, inmate education and training, UNICOR allocates over $3 million to ongoing vocational education programs, as well as $400,000, annually, to upgrade vocational machinery and equipment. In 1983 and 1984 an additional $3 million was allocated, annually, to support innovative vocational programs.

NEW OCCUPATIONAL PROGRAMS

Vocational training programs for inmates, frequently referred to as occupational programs, have been a cornerstone of federal prison education programs for many years. Instruction in building trades, welding, heating and air-conditioning, and automotive maintenance and repair, and similar courses have been offered traditionally, in most institutions. In the early 1970's, with the advent of new office machines and early computers, training in office and related business occupations were introduced or expanded in many federal prisons. Where once typing and data processing courses had been available, on a

limited basis, in women's or co-correctional institutions, these courses which involved the new equipment were extended to male institutions. In the late 1970's and early 1980's the computer revolution also had an impact on traditional occupational programs which began to change to provide for new automated and machine controlled operations. The infusion of new support funds began in 1983 to move federal prison VT programs into the computer age, maintaining and strengthening at the same time, what continued to be relevant in the traditional programs.

All programs, funded by UNICOR, stress employability in emerging as well as traditional occupational fields, for which job opportunities will continue to be strong in the immediate future. To-date, programs have been funded in such new fields as petroleum technology, computerized drafting, numerically controlled machine operations, computer programming and maintenance, and water treatment. Traditional courses, which have been upgraded and updated, include commercial horticulture, food service, truck driving and home entertainment equipment installation and maintenance. Instruction in these courses is provided by both career Civil Service instructors and by contracts with nearby educational institutions, including community and junior colleges. The new programs which prove successful will be supported, once the pilot/demonstration phase is completed, by Congressionally appropriated funds.

NEW LITERACY PROGRAM

About the same time that new vocational training initiatives were undertaken by the Bureau of Prisons, it also established a mandatory literacy policy. This new policy provided that all federal prisoners whose educational

achievement was less than 6.0, as measured by the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT), would be required to enroll in a literacy program for 90 days. Additionally, all promotions in Federal Prison Industries beyond the entry level grade would be conditioned upon successful completion of a literacy program. Tying literacy to promotions in Industries proved to be a very strong motivational tool. The difference between the $.42 an hour pay for the entry labor grade and the $1.05 for the top labor grade was a solid and sound economic motivator for most federal prisoners. As a result, between the time of adoption of the new policy in 1981 and the last available statistics at the end of FY'83, enrollments and completions in literacy programs more than doubled. Enrollments went from a total of 2,653 in FY'81 to over 6,000 at the end of FY'83. Completions increased from 1,441 in the same base year to over 3,775. The simple goal of the program is to reach those federal prisoners, estimated at 5,000 or 20% of the total population, who function below the 6th grade level at the time of admission to a federal prison. An important option for the near future is to move the required literacy level from the 6th up to the 8th grade, which, according to the U.S. Department of Education, is the prevailing community standard for functional literacy.

COMPUTER ASSISTED INSTRUCTION - PIONEER Phase I

Still another new option in offender education revolves around the use of computers to assist in all phases of education. Approximately ten years ago the Federal Bureau of Prisons mounted its first computer assisted instructional program at several Federal Prison. At that time the computer was linked by a live telephone line to

a main-frame at a nearby university. The terminal consisted of a machine that looked very much like a typewriter with a roll of paper attached. When it worked, the machine made a loud clanging noise and if there were several in a classroom, it was difficult to do anything else in the same room. Further, the machines suffered a good deal of "down" time, which made it practically impossible to schedule use of the terminals on any reliable basis. The costs associated with their operation were relatively high. The telephone line alone cost approximently $1,000 a month and the terminals $2,000-$3,000 each per year. There was practically no courseware available beyond mathematics and some simple language-arts materials.

Another early effort involved a teaching machine and courseware developed by a teacher at the federal prison in Lompoc, California. Known as the Allen Teaching Machine, named after the teacher, Byron Allen, prototypes were produced and distributed to selected federal prisons on an experimental basis. Courseware was developed nationally and also locally by both teachers and students after brief training programs. These machines, like the computer terminals, also suffered serious mechanical difficulties, not least of which were blown fuses and similar problems associated with electrical systems not geared to the new equipment. These early efforts were abandoned because of high costs, lack of courseware, and technical problems and a wait-and-see policy adopted.

COMPUTER ASSISTED INSTRUCTION - PIONEER Phase II

Approximately two years ago both hardware and courseware began to surface which were not only cost-effective, but

overcame practically all of the shortcomings of the first generation of equipment and courseware. Mechanical operawere relatively quiet and trouble-free and, most important, from a security standpoint, the computers were self-contained and did not require live telephone line access.

Where once the selection of machines and courseware had been very limited, correctional educators were suddenly faced with a wide assortment of machines and courseware, very few of which were compatible with each other. Each institution in the Federal Correctional System had the freedom to decide which computer assisted instructional system and courseware were right for it, and which it could afford. One national standardized program involved three institutions and an integrated system in which up to 95 terminals could be accomodated by one minicomputer in each institution. The minicomputer housed close to two thousand hours of instruction in courses ranging from basic literacy through high school and included life coping skills, career assessment and development, and English as a Second Language (ESL).

Still another program at the federal prison camp, Leavenworth, involves a computer based electronic technician training program provided by Control Data Corporation. Each institution effort, as well as the national one, was and still is, regarded as experimental, designed to identify, ultimately, the most appropriate computer assisted instructional options for the Federal Prison System.

Currently, the Federal Prison System has introduced computer assisted instruction in all but eight federal prisons. Both academic and vocational courses are offered

as well as job search and retention skills, and ESL. Hardware in use include a wide assortment of personal computers as well as integrated systems.

CONCLUSIONS

These are a few, but among the most significant new developments in correctional education in the Federal Prison System. They are designed, primarily, to meet the basic mission of the Federal Prison System's education and industrial programs - to assist the released offenders find and retain jobs, and to become economically independent, law-abiding members of society.

The new educational technology will permit teachers, increasingly, to move away from drill and practice functions to the more challenging aspects of teacher-student relationships. There isn't a subject area or procedure in education which has not, or will not, be affected by these new developments. The creative teacher will welcome them and build new linkages to the student to extend, enrich, and expedite the learning process.

RECOMMENDED READING

1. *FY'83 ABE and GED Year End Reports, Education Department, Bureau of Prisons, Washington, D.C. March, 1984*

2. *"Education for Tomorrow," Bureau of Prisons, Washington, D.C.*

3. *Task Force on Education, Training, and Selection - Final Report November 12, 1981. Bureau of Prisons, Washington, D.C.*

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